WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for retrieving contact information based on a user's context, comprising:

monitoring the user's context to identify contact-related portions of the user's context;

analyzing the identified contact-related portions; and

retrieving zero, one or more contact information elements from a database based on the analyzed contact-related portions.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising unobtrusively outputting at least one retrieved contact element.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein monitoring the user's context to identify contact-related portions of the user's context comprises:

converting the user's context to a plurality of searchable representation elements, each representing a potential contact-related portion; and

determining, for each searchable representation, if that searchable representation element is a contact-related portion.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein determining if a searchable representation element is a contact-related portion comprises determining if that searchable representation element is at least one of at least a postal code, an email address, a location on a network and a telephone number.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein analyzing the identified contact-related portions comprises:

comparing each identified contact-related portion of the plurality of searchable representation elements to contact information present in the contact information database;

determining, for each identified contact-related portion, if that contact-related portion matches any contact information elements of the contact information database;

assigning a score to each determined match between one of the identified contact-related portions and one of the contact information elements; and

determining, based on the assigned scores, for each match between the identified contact-related portions and the contact information elements, zero, one or more contact information elements that are related to the user's context.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein determining, based on the assigned scores, for each match between the identified contact-related portions and the contact information

elements, zero, one or more contact information elements that are related to the user's context comprises comparing the assigned scores for each match to a threshold score value.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein assigning a score to each match between the identified contact-related portions and the contact information elements, comprises combining the scores assigned to at least two matches between at least two contact-related portions and at least one related contact information element into a combined score for at least one of the at least two matches.

8. The method of claim 5, wherein assigning a score to each match between the identified contact-related portions and the contact information elements comprises combining the scores assigned to at least two matches between at least one contact-related portion and at least two related contact information elements into a combined score for at least one of the at least two matches

9. The method of claim 5, where assigning a score to each match between the identified contact-related portions and the contact information elements comprises assigning a combined score to at least one of at least two interrelated matches.

10. The method of claim 5, further comprising ranking the contact information elements based on the scores assigned to the matches for the contact information elements.

11. The method of claim 5, further comprising forming a display list that includes contact information elements corresponding to scores above a defined threshold.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein forming the display list that includes contact information elements corresponding to scores above the defined threshold further comprises limiting the display list to at most n contact information elements having the highest values.

13. The method of claim 5, further comprising forming a display list that includes contact information elements corresponding to a given number n of scores having the highest values.

14. The method of claim 11, further comprising displaying the display list within the user's context.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein monitoring the user's context to identify contact-related portions of the user's context comprises:

determining at least one representation of at least one contact information element present in the database; and

determining, for each determined representation, if there is at least one contact-related portion in the user's current context that matches that determined representation.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein determining at least one representation of at least one contact information element present in the database comprises selecting at least one contact information element as the at least one determined representation.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein determining, for each determined representation, if there is at least one contact-related portion in the user's current context that matches that determined representation comprises searching the user's current context for instances of the selected contact information element.

18. The method of claim 15, wherein determining at least one representation of at least one contact information element present in the database comprises generating at least one regular expression from at least one contact information element as the at least one determined representation.

19. The method of claim 15, wherein determining, for each determined representation, if there is at least one contact-related portion in the user's current context that matches that determined representation comprises querying the user's current context using the at least one generated regular expression.

20. A method for inputting contact information into a contact information database comprising:

scanning a business card containing contact information elements;

making an audio recording of a contact;

making a video recording of a contact; and

inputting other contact information.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the at least one contact information element comprises at least one of a postal code, an email address, a location on a network, an organization name and a telephone number.

22. An information retrieval system, comprising:

a database that stores contact information; and

a contact information retrieval system that retrieves contact information from the database based on a current context of a user and that unobtrusively displays the retrieved contact information relative to the user's current context.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the database is populated by at least one of a personal name, an organization name, a position title, a business card image, a video recording, an audio recording, a postal address, a network location, an email address,and at least one telephone number.

24. The system of claim 22, wherein the contact information retrieval system comprises at least one of:

a context monitoring subsystem;

an information analysis subsystem; and

a contact information display subsystem.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein the context monitoring subsystem identifies contact information based on the content of the user's current context.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein the context monitoring subsystem recognizes at least one of a personal name, an organization name, a position title, a business card image, a video recording, an audio recording, a postal address, a network location, an email address,and at least one telephone number that is present in the content of the user's current context.

27. The system of claim 26, wherein the context monitoring subsystem recognizes the postal address by recognizing a postal code and stores in a memory the recognized postal code and a predetermined amount of data that precedes the postal code.

28. The system of claim 26, wherein the information analysis subsystem matches at least one recognized one of the personal name, the organization name, the position title, the business card image, the video recording, an audio recording, the postal address, the network location, the email address and the at least one telephone number to at least one contact information element stored in the database.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein the information analysis subsystem assigns a score to at least one matched one of the personal name, the organization name, the position title,, the address, the network location, the email address and the at least one telephone number that matches at least one contact information element stored in the database.

30. The system of claim 28, wherein the information analysis subsystem assigns a partial score to at least one matched one of the personal name, the organization name, the position title,, the address, the network location, the email address and the at least one telephone number that partially matches at least one contact information element stored in the database.

31. The system of claim 28, wherein the matched contact information is ranked based on the user's current context and output to the user.

32. The system of claim 31, wherein corollary information corresponding to the matched contact information is retrieved from the database.

33. The system of claim 32, wherein the matched contact information and the corollary information are made available to the user.

34. The system of claim 22, wherein the user is provided with an unobtrusive notification of the retrieved contact information.

35 The system of claim 34, wherein the notification allows the user to access more contact information by a single interaction.

36. An information retrieval apparatus, comprising:

a database containing contact information;

an information gathering device that inputs contact information into the database;

an information monitoring device that monitors a user's current context to identify potential contact information;

an information analysis device that assigns a score to the identified potential contact information; and

a data output device that notifies a user of zero, one or more contacts based on scores associated with the potential contact information.

37. The apparatus of claim 36, wherein the information gathering device is at least one of a workstation, a desktop computer, a laptop computer, a scanner, an audio/video recorder, and a remote station.

38. The apparatus of claim 36, wherein the data output device unobtrusively notifies the user of one or more contacts.